



Dengue Fever

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

GENERAL QUESTIONS

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What is dengue fever?

Dengue fever is a viral illness spread by mosquitoes. There are four closely related dengue viruses (DENV 1, DENV 2, DENV 3, and DENV 4). These viruses are transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. The disease occurs mainly in tropical Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific. It is most common during the rainy season in areas infested with infected mosquitoes. Sometimes, persons arriving from other countries may enter the United States with dengue fever and infect local mosquitoes, as happened in Hawaii in 2001 and 2011. The current 2015 Hawaii Island outbreak involves DENV serotype 1.

How do you get it?

The dengue virus is spread through the bite of infected *Aedes* mosquitoes. Dengue CANNOT be spread directly from person to person. It is estimated that there are over 100 million cases of dengue worldwide each year.

What are the symptoms of dengue fever?

The symptoms of dengue fever include sudden onset of fever; severe headaches; eye, joint, and muscle pain; and rash. The rash typically appears on the hands, arms, legs and feet 3 to 4 days after the fever begins. Minor bleeding problems can also occur. The symptoms usually go away completely within 1 to 2 weeks. Sometimes, people with dengue fever have blood clotting

problems. When this happens, the illness is called severe dengue. Severe dengue is a very serious illness with abnormal bleeding and very low blood pressure (shock).

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start 5 to 7 days after being bitten by infected mosquitoes, but the onset can range from 3 – 14 days.

Is it possible to be infected with dengue virus but have no symptoms?

Yes. As many as 50-75% of all dengue-infected people have no clinical signs or symptoms of the disease. Some infected people experience fever but their other symptoms are mild and non-specific, making their dengue infection difficult to diagnose. Ill persons who suspect they have dengue should see a healthcare provider.

Can people who are infected but have no symptoms transmit the virus to mosquitoes?

Some evidence suggests that it is possible for asymptomatic people infected with dengue virus to transmit the virus to mosquitoes who bite them, although the role of asymptomatic transmission in dengue-affected areas is still unclear. Such risk makes it all the more important that everyone take precautions against mosquitoes (e.g., eradicating mosquito breeding grounds, covering up exposed parts of the body, and using insect repellent) to avoid being bitten and infected in the first place.

What is the treatment for dengue fever?

There is no specific treatment for dengue fever. Bed rest and acetaminophen (Tylenol) to treat fever and pain are recommended. Aspirin and NSAIDS (ibuprofen, naproxen) are NOT recommended as they can make bleeding problems worse. There is currently no vaccine for dengue fever. Individuals with dengue should seek out medical care.

Do pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers need to take extra precautions?

It is possible for a pregnant woman who is infected with dengue virus to infect her unborn baby or her newborn baby at birth. It is especially important that pregnant mothers receive proper medical attention if infected with the dengue virus. Like everyone else, pregnant women should focus on avoiding becoming infected by eliminating standing water where mosquitoes can breed, covering up exposed areas of the body to avoid being bitten, and using repellent containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus, which are approved for pregnant women.

The risk of a mother transmitting the virus to her newborn through breastmilk is considered low, and the health benefits of breastfeeding greatly outweigh the likelihood of disease transmission. Ultimately, breastfeeding mothers should consult with their pediatrician about concerns they have regarding breastfeeding and dengue risk.

If you get dengue fever once, can you get it again?

Yes. There are four major types of dengue viruses (DENV 1, DENV 2, DENV 3, and DENV 4). Having dengue fever with one type of dengue virus will not protect you from the other three types.

If you want to get tested for dengue fever after more than a week has passed from the time you were ill, an antibody test can determine whether you were previously infected with dengue. However, determining which dengue virus type you had is not possible after the first week of illness.

How can you keep from getting it?

- When traveling to areas that have dengue fever, try to avoid exposure to mosquitoes. *Aedes* mosquitoes are usually most active in the early morning hours after daybreak, in the late afternoon before dark, and any time during the day when indoors or in shady areas.
- Use mosquito netting over beds, and screens on windows and doorways.
- Use mosquito repellents with 20-30% DEET and wear appropriate clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants that reduce exposure to mosquito bites.
- Mosquitoes are drawn to dark colors; if possible, wear white or light colored clothing when you are likely to be exposed to biting mosquitoes.

Do people who have contracted dengue fever need to be quarantined?

Dengue fever cases do NOT require quarantine, because dengue fever is not spread from person to person. The dengue virus is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito, so the most effective way to prevent future cases is to eliminate mosquitoes that might bite infected persons and then spread the virus to uninfected persons. Quarantines are extreme measures that are effective primarily for serious diseases spread by human-to-human contact.